

Village proposes small levy increase

Written by CAROL POMEDAY

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Spending plan would include raises for president, trustees; public hearing set for Monday, Nov. 12

The Belgium Village Board Tuesday finalized a \$1.05 million budget that calls for a tax levy of \$704,785, which is \$4,685 more than last year and the maximum allowed by the state.

A hearing on the budget will be at 7 p.m. Monday, Nov. 12.

The budget includes a 4% raise for office staff, a 1% raise for public works employees and raises for the village president and board members.

The president's pay will increase from \$1,500 to \$2,000 on April 16 after the spring election. Three years ago, the president was paid \$3,000, but that was cut in half by former president Kevin Kowalkowski.

Village board members will be paid \$60 for board meetings and \$40 for committee meetings. The current pay is \$45 for board meetings and \$22.50 for committees.

The pay will go into effect April 16 for trustees elected next year and the following year for those whose terms do not expire until 2014. The impact will be about \$5,500 a year bringing the total wages to \$15,560 for board members.

The increase in meeting pay did not sit well with trustees Ken Hirschmann and Vickie Boehnlein, who believe the pay should stay the same or be more modest.

Only four of seven board members attended Tuesday's meeting, but two of the three absent members are on the Finance and Personnel Committee, which recommended the increase.

"I didn't get into this for the money," Hirschmann said. "It wasn't too long ago, I was out there (in the audience at budget hearings) and I wouldn't be happy seeing the board giving themselves a raise."

Boehnlein added, "It seems like a big jump to me. I think most of us would have been content to stay where we were or get a little increase. But if it means more people come to meetings, that's good."

To balance the budget, the board decided to take \$70,000 from the water utility fund, which was recommended by its new auditor Baker-Tilly.

"I don't know if we can do that every year," Public Works Director Dan Birenbaum said. "Now, we're going to have some big debt, and I don't want the water fund to suffer."

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Village President Richard Howells said he plans to go through the 2013 budget line by line and look for ways to cut so the water utility is not tapped next year.

“Everything I find (to save money) I’m going to suggest to your committees,” he said.

Hirschmann said that was good, noting, “Our water bills are going up and up. We can’t afford to keep raising it.”

Birenbaum said he had hoped to hire another employee, but that’s not possible with this year’s tight budget.

The largest expense is for public works, which totals \$190,000.

The budget includes \$56,818 for fire protection, which is 40% of the department’s budget. The Town of Belgium pays the remainder, which is \$85,900.

The fire department will purchase a \$8,500 light tower for its new fire engine, which goes to accident scenes in addition to fires. The department will cover half the cost and \$2,000 for installation.

The village budgeted \$3,000 for the village marshal and \$2,500 for the deputy marshal, the same as last year. The men do not have set hours, but are expected to respond to complaints, enforce village ordinances and do some patrolling.

Heritage Park will get a \$4,200 scoreboard for the baseball field and the bathrooms will be upgraded at Community Park.

Village residents will pay \$94.44 per household for garbage collection by Veolia. That is a separate fee on the tax bill rather than part of the general fund. Veolia’s contract expires in December 2013.

The village expects to receive \$45,660 in state shared revenue funds, a slight decrease from last year, and \$54,570 in state road aid, \$7,000 more than last year.

The village’s debt service will be \$191,725.